

St. Francis de Sales Church (Oakland Cathedral)
2100 Martin Luther King Jr. Way (Grove Street)
Oakland
Alameda County
California

HABS No. CA-2345

HABS
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1-OAK,
24-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, CA 94107

Historic American Buildings Survey

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES CHURCH (Oakland Cathedral) 24-

HABS
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1-OAK,

HABS No. CA-2345

Location: 2100 Martin Luther King, Jr. Way
Oakland
Alameda County
California

U.S.G.S. Oakland West Quadrangle (7.5')
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
10.564140.4184920

Present Owner: Roman Catholic Diocese of Oakland
2900 Lake Shore Avenue
Oakland, California

Present use: Vacant

Significance: St. Francis de Sales Church is a characteristic example of a large brick urban Catholic church of the late 19th century. It is Gothic Revival in style, has a cruciform plan, and a plaster ceiling of generally uniform height for good acoustics. With its bell tower and spire, it was one of the tallest buildings in Oakland when completed in 1893, and an important visual landmark for both its size and its siting. Built with money donated by Mary Canning, an Irish immigrant who made a fortune in real estate, and designed by Charles J.I. Devlin, a first generation Irish architect, for a largely Irish congregation, the building represented the growing prominence of the Irish and of Roman Catholics at a time of strong anti-Irish and anti-Catholic feeling. In 1962, St. Francis de Sales was designated as the cathedral for the newly formed Diocese of Oakland, and it was substantially remodeled in 1966-1967 in the spirit of new attitudes toward art, architecture, and liturgy following the Second Vatican Council. It was the first cathedral in the United States to be so modified, and became well-known both for its architectural modernization and for its modern liturgy and music.

PART I. HISTORIC INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. **Date of erection:** From *The Monitor*, the weekly newspaper of the Archdiocese of San Francisco, plans for St. Francis de Sales Church were reported complete April 15, 1891; the first contract, for brickwork, was filed July 22, 1891 - therefore, construction began after that date; the cornerstone laying ceremony was September 13, 1891; and the dedication of the completed church took place on July 9, 1893.

2. **Architects and designers:**

a. **Charles J. I. Devlin:** The original architect of St. Francis de Sales Church was Charles J.I. Devlin (1858-1928), the official architect of the Archdiocese of San Francisco under Archbishop Patrick Riordan beginning about 1887. Devlin worked for the archdiocese at a time when it was dominated by Irish immigrants, and when there was enormous institutional expansion to accommodate a growing Catholic population with increasing wealth and a growing political and social role in the Bay Area. During his long career, Devlin designed many of the most prominent buildings in the archdiocese, including churches, schools, hospitals, and convents. While most of his works have been altered or demolished, his best known works are all still standing - St. Francis de Sales Church (1893), St. Patrick's Seminary (1898) in Menlo Park, the church of St. Francis of Assisi (1913) on Vallejo Street in San Francisco as it was rebuilt after the earthquake and fire of 1906, and St. Ignatius Church (1926) for the Jesuits at the University of San Francisco. St. Francis of Assisi most closely recalls the character of St. Francis de Sales before it was remodeled in 1966, with its Gothic Revival style and interior embellished with large paintings. Devlin also designed the Academy of the Sacred Heart in Menlo Park, and the following buildings in San Francisco: Star of the Sea Church (1887), Academy of the Sacred Heart (1888), St. Charles Borromeo Church

(1887), Presentation Convent, Sisters of Mercy Hospital (1890), Mary's Help Hospital (1890), Most Holy Redeemer Church, and Holy Cross Church (1887).

While little is known about Charles Devlin's life, his background and training appear typical of his time both as an Irish Catholic and as an architect. He grew up in a large immigrant family; his father was a building contractor; he trained to be an architect in a long apprenticeship (with the San Francisco firm of Kenitzer and Raun beginning at the age of 17); after he opened his own office at the age of 27 he employed several members of his family; he never married and lived with various family members for his whole life; and most of his work throughout his career was for Irish clients (most notably the famous "Blind Boss" of San Francisco, Christopher Buckley).

Later in his career he worked in partnership with his brother Leo (23 years younger), who also designed several churches and other buildings in the archdiocese of San Francisco.

In addition to his work for the church, Devlin maintained a general architectural practice designing houses, flats, and commercial buildings in San Francisco.

- b. Patrick Charles Keely:** The designer of the original altar for St. Francis de Sales was Patrick Charles Keely (1816-1896), the "patriarch of United States Roman Catholic Church architecture"¹ and the designer of 600 to 700 Catholic churches in the eastern U.S. The outlines of Keely's life and work are similar to those of Charles Devlin. Keely was born in Ireland, the son of a contractor, and became an architect without any university or school training. Most of his work was in

1 Murphy, Robert T., "Patrick Charles Keely", *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, New York: The Free Press, 1982. Volume 2, p. 556-557.

the Gothic Revival Style, influenced by Pugin, and his career was dominated by his work for the Catholic church. Several of Keely's most prominent works are similar in important ways to St. Francis de Sales, although there is no documented influence of Keely on Devlin. St. Joseph's Cathedral in Hartford, designed in 1873 and under construction for many years, for example, was a large cruciform plan church with scissor trusses and massive towers at the west end. Similarly, the Cathedral of the Holy Name in Chicago, was a large church in a cruciform plan with aisles and a massive corner tower at the west end.

c. Michael O'Sullivan: Michael O'Sullivan was a San Francisco artist responsible for the 1911 renovation of St. Francis de Sales, including the trompe l'oeil ceiling and life-of-Christ paintings. He restored these works in 1941. O'Sullivan was a prominent church artist involved in the embellishment of over 100 Catholic churches.

d. Rambusch Designers, Craftsmen, Lighting Engineers: This New York interior design firm, responsible for the 1966 remodeling of St. Francis de Sales, specialized in the modernization of old churches, and adaptations to modern liturgical requirements. Harold Rambusch was in charge.

3. Original and Subsequent Owners: St. Francis de Sales Church was built for the Parish of St. Francis de Sales of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of San Francisco. When the Diocese of Oakland was created out of the Archdiocese of San Francisco in 1962, ownership of the building was transferred to the new diocese. Until recently, it was customary for the bishop to be listed as the owner of a church in his diocese. Thus, Archbishop Patrick Riordan, representing the diocese, was the original legal owner of St. Francis de Sales Church.

4. Builder, Contractor, Suppliers: From contract notices published in the *California Architect and Building News* and *Edward's Transcript of Records* the following contracts, with a total value of \$83,641.00, were filed for the

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original construction of St. Francis de Sales Church:

- a. July 22, 1891
Remillard Brick Co.
\$38,995.00 for bricks and brickwork
- b. August 22, 1891
Richard Sinnott
\$17,000.00 for carpentry: window frames, floors and joists, roof frames
- c. October 31, 1891
George H. Fuller
\$4,560.00 for pews, pulpit, and other furniture
- d. January 23, 1892
Forderer Cornice Works
\$7,186.00 for sheetmetal: finials, crosses, flashing, gutters, downspouts.
- e. July 16, 1892
E.P. McGowan
Amount not recorded for plumbing (for water and gas)
- f. July 22, 1892
G.P. and T.J. Smyth
\$7,500.00 for lathing and plastering interior walls and ceiling
- g. February 3, 1893
P.B. and P.H. Hughes
\$8,400.00 for unspecified work

In addition, the following items, suppliers or contractors, and costs were cited in newspaper articles:

- a. organ: Built by Odell Organ Company of New York City, donated by Mrs. Jane Driscoll, \$10,000.00.
- b. stained glass windows, church: made by Franz Mayer, Munich.

- c. stained glass windows, sacristy: 14 windows made by Butterfield, San Francisco and donated by parishioners.
- d. altar: designed by Patrick Charles Keely, Boston
executed by Charles E. Hall & Co., Boston
installed by D.J. Gilman and T.P. Mahoney
cost \$15,000.00.
- e. candelabra and crucifix: made in Boston
- f. statues and stations of the cross: suppliers unknown;
stations of the cross were colored figures in alto
relievo.
- g. bell: supplier unknown, gift of B. McFadden in memory
of his wife, Veronica.
- h. sanctuary lamp: supplier unknown, \$1,000.00.
- i. gas lights: bracket fixtures on each column and along
walls by Thomas Day & Co., with electric ignition
controlled by a switchboard in the sacristy.

Mrs. Canning's contribution was estimated by the newspapers to be between \$100,000.00 and \$125,000.00. While no definitive list is available, either of donors or of constituent elements of the church and its furnishings, most of the above list was paid for by Mrs. Canning, except as noted.

- 5. Original Plans and Construction:** No original plans for St Francis de Sales Church are presently available although a newspaper account once referred to watercolor drawings of the front and side elevations², and a plan was placed in the cornerstone³ and may be available if the building is

2 "A Gift of \$75,000 . . .", *The Monitor*, April 15, 1891, p. 5.

3 "In His Name: The Corner Stone of St. Francis de Sales is Laid . . .", *Oakland Daily Evening Tribune*, September 14, 1891, p. 8.

demolished. The only plans now available are those drawn as part of a structural survey prior to the earthquake in 1989 which are reproduced in this report⁴, and alteration drawings prepared for the 1966 remodeling, which are on file at the Diocese of Oakland.

Early known illustrations of the church are surprisingly hard to find. An ink drawing of the temporary 1886 church by J. Sheerin, a 13-year-old student in the school, and a map of the "Parish and School District" by Frank McCarthy, a 14-year-old student, are hanging in the rectory. Line drawings of the current building by three separate artists, all unknown, appeared in local publications in the years 1891 to 1894, all viewing the church from the southwest.⁵

In addition, photographs of the same exterior view appeared in numerous promotional books and magazine articles about Oakland in the 1890s and 1900s.⁶ There are no views of the interior known from this period.

No other construction records survive from the architect, contractors, or the parish. However, notices of several contracts for various aspects of the building's construction exist in the contemporary journal, *The California Architect and Building News* (cited in Section 4, above) and the completed building was described in detail

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- 4 David Logan Messinger & Associates, "Structural Performance Evaluation of St. Francis de Sales Cathedral, Oakland, California". Prepared for the Diocese of Oakland, January 23, 1989.
- 5 "In His Name . . .", *ibid*; "Dedicated to God: The Church of St. Francis de Sales . . .", *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 10, 1893; and "Church of St. Francis de Sales . . .", *The California Review*, vol. 1:4 (March 1894), plate 22.
- 6 For example, see *Oakland Tribune*, "A City of Churches . . .", *Alameda County Illustrated*, Oakland: 1898, p. 224-226.

in several newspaper articles.⁷

- 6. Alterations and Additions:** Nineteenth-century Catholic church buildings, more than most others of the period, were adorned with artwork and memorials over time. As it was completed in 1893, St. Francis de Sales lacked certain amenities and finishes that were typically absent in new churches.

As completed, the architectural shell was largely in place, but except for the stained glass windows and decorated essential furnishings and fixtures such as the pulpit, sanctuary lamp, and altars, it was largely devoid of decoration.

The character of the new church was that of a somewhat empty and unfinished place. Over the following years, numerous embellishments were made, often the result of specific gifts. The most substantial embellishments are described below:

- a. Statuary (1905):** In 1905, six figures sculpted of Carrara marble by "the finest sculptors" in Pisa were presented to the church and placed on the altars in places that had been provided for them. These represented the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin, the Sistine Madonna, St. Joseph, and two angels.⁸
- b. Renovation (1911):** For the 25th anniversary (called the Silver Jubilee) of the parish, 18 years after the church was completed, a major renovation was undertaken which

⁷ The most extensive coverage was in "St. Francis de Sales, Oakland: Dedication Supplement", *The Monitor*, July 15, 1893, p. 1-7. Other major articles were "To the Glory of God . . .", *The Weekly Times*, April 27, 1893, p. 1; "Dedicated to God . . .", *ibid*; and "The Secret Out . . .", *The Weekly Times*, July 13, 1893.

⁸ "Unique Sculptures . . .", *The Monitor*, May 27, 1905.

filled the emptiness, completed the church, and produced a richer and more comfortable environment. The Monitor said that the renovated church was "ten-fold more resplendent".⁹ Michael O'Sullivan, a San Francisco artist, was in charge of the work, which included the gilding of the ribs in the plaster vaulting; the decoration of wall surfaces "in tapestry effect" in the "prevailing color . . . silver gray"; and the production of 22 large paintings on canvas to fill the clerestory panels on nave, transept, and sanctuary walls. The paintings represented the life of Christ, the Blessed Sacrament, the Immaculate Conception, the Holy Family, angels, St. Joseph, St. Francis de Sales, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Patrick, St. Bridget, and St. Crysostom. Some of the paintings were copies of famous works and others were original conceptions.

In addition, for the first time, a heating system was installed.

- c. **Restoration (1941):** For the 50th anniversary (Golden Jubilee) of the laying of the cornerstone of the church, Michael O'Sullivan restored the paintings and artwork which he had produced in 1911. At this time the narthex was paneled in oak.
- d. **Remodeling (1967):** After St. Frances de Sales was elevated to Cathedral status in 1962, it was remodelled to accommodate the new liturgical requirements of the Catholic Church, which were the result of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

At St. Francis de Sales, which was said to be "the first cathedral in the United States to be completely adapted"¹⁰ to the new forms and also an extreme case of

9 "Fr. McSweeney's Day of Triumph . . .", The Monitor, November 25, 1911, p. 1 ff.

10 "Rededication of Cathedral", Oakland Tribune, February 2, 1967, p. 13.

such an adaptation¹¹, radical changes were made that removed almost every decorative embellishment of the church except the stained glass windows and those integral to the architecture of the original design. The result was a church that in many ways must resemble the building as it was built to the designs of Charles Devlin, before even the original furnishings were installed.

On the exterior, the dark red-painted brick walls and light trim of the old church were painted white with light blue-gray trim around windows. Inside, the original altars, stations of the cross, the sanctuary rail, the pulpit, and other decorative artwork and fixtures were removed; the paintings, wall tapestries, gilding, and other artwork of O'Sullivan were painted over or removed; the plaster wall surfaces were painted off-white; upper wall surfaces where O'Sullivan's mural paintings had been, as well as the walls of the south transept and the end walls of the aisles, were clad in acoustic tile; the oak-grained columns were painted brown; the floor was covered in a gold-colored carpet in the aisles and sanctuary with terrazzo in a light tan color to match the predominate terrazzo in the narthex installed under the pews; the original pews were replaced with new pews constructed by Bay City Cabinet Co., Oakland; the walls of the sanctuary were refinished from floor to ceiling with dark wood ribbing, covering up three stained glass windows; the original bishop's throne was removed; the side walls of the chapels were refinished with a burlap textured fabric; all original light fixtures were replaced by modern fixtures; and the sacristies were remodeled, with nearly all the original furnishings and embellishments taken out and new cabinetry installed.

In addition to these changes, a number of new furnishings and artworks were commissioned and

11 Conmy, Peter T., "St. Francis de Sales History", *The Catholic Voice*, January 25, 1967, p. 3-5.

installed. Those modern features still in the building at the time of the HABS survey were a massive granite main altar; a small modern Gothic white marble altar inlaid with mosaic in the north chapel; a carved green marble altar, a bronze tabernacle with the apostles in relief on the door, and a round bronze-colored corona with cut glass drops in the (south) Blessed Sacrament Chapel; a new bishop's throne and a new pulpit in hardwood and granite (the throne being set against a cream-colored travertine wall panel on which is mounted the Bishop's crest and coat-of-arms in bronze); modern Gothic parclose screens between the sanctuary and the side chapels; a bronze ambry in the north chapel "In Memory of Anthony Vitkowski"; a wood figure of Christ on the back wall of the sanctuary; a polychrome ceramic assemblage of relief images representing the life of St. Francis de Sales in the north chapel; a predominantly gold mosaic wall in the south chapel; and 14 ceramic stations of the cross on the walls of the side aisles.

Later, in 1978, a handicapped entrance ramp was built into the side entrance on 21st Street. In 1982 the confessional in the north transept was removed when the new organ was installed. This organ, built by Schoenstein & Co. of San Francisco, has been dismantled and crated for protection against any possible future damage and is presently stored in the Cathedral.

B. Historical Context

The history of St. Francis de Sales Church is associated with the development of Oakland, the growth of the Irish immigrant population, and the development of the Catholic church in Oakland.

St. Francis de Sales was established in an area just north of the original street grid of the city of Oakland. The city was incorporated in 1852 and grew into this area with the construction of the trans-continental railroad in the late 1860s. The railroad arrived in 1869, and in 1872 the area up to 35th Street, including the future site of St. Francis de Sales was annexed. The establishment of the State University

at Berkeley in 1868 stimulated growth along several developing routes between Oakland and Berkeley. St. Francis de Sales was established near the intersection of two of these routes, Grove Street (now Martin Luther King Jr. Way) and San Pablo Avenue, and one block west of another major route, Telegraph Avenue.

1. The Catholic Church in Oakland

The pre-Gold Rush period is of little importance to the later history of Catholicism in the East Bay. Priests from Mission San Jose (established 1797) occasionally celebrated Mass in the houses of the Peralta family during the Mexican period, but no towns existed to constitute parishes and the Mission itself had little authority after secularization in 1833.

Conditions changed suddenly after John Marshall's discovery of gold and the influx of population which began in 1849. Bishop Joseph Sadoc Alemany, a Spanish Dominican, arrived in San Francisco on December 6, 1850. The Diocese of Monterey at that time covered all of Alta California, but the Bay Area's growth proved so precipitous that Alemany was appointed Archbishop of San Francisco in 1853 while the Diocese of Monterey (including Los Angeles) was assigned to Bishop Amat. The San Francisco diocese then included the East Bay and would continue to do so until 1962.

Despite intense anti-Catholic sentiments in the new state, Catholicism flourished with the flood of immigrants, particularly the Irish. Jesuits and nuns of various orders provided education otherwise lacking on the frontier, quickly opening schools attached to parish churches and to convents, as well as colleges in San Francisco and Santa Clara. In San Francisco, the parish of St. Francis was established in 1849, St. Patrick's in 1851, and St. Mary's (now Old St. Mary's) in 1854.

Compared with San Francisco, the East Bay was relatively late in developing. Priests from Mission San Jose established St. Anthony's Chapel in Oakland in 1853 (not to be confused with the later St. Anthony's parish in

Brooklyn). In 1858, St. Anthony's Chapel became the Parish of St. Mary's (later Immaculate Conception, or Old St. Mary's). As the pioneer parish, St. Mary's served the area from Pinole to Mission San Jose. As the population of the East Bay increased in the latter half of the 19th century, parishes were subdivided into ever-smaller units to better serve the developing towns and neighborhoods. Oakland parishes were established in the 19th century in the following order:

St. Mary's (Immaculate Conception), 1858 (Church built 1868).

St Anthony's (Brooklyn), 1871

Sacred Heart (Temescal), 1876

St. Patrick's (West Oakland), 1879

St. Francis de Sales, 1886

St. Joseph's, 1891

St. Elizabeth's, 1892

St. Columba's, 1898

2. St. Francis de Sales Parish

St. Francis de Sales was established on January 29, 1886 (the feast day of St. Francis de Sales) as the fifth parish subdivision in Oakland. The parish was named at the suggestion of Archbishop Patrick Riordan for a popular French saint (1567-1622), who was a leader of the Counter-Reformation and the author of *Introduction to the Devout Life*. The new parish took parts of St. Mary's, St. Patrick's, and St. Anthony's, not without resentment from the older parishes. The new parish covered much of the Second, Third, and Fifth Wards of Oakland from the Bay to and including Lake Merritt and the Piedmont Tract. As Oakland's population continued to grow, St. Francis de Sales itself became a victim of subdivision. No additions

were ever made to the parish; instead, the northwest corner went to St. Andrew's Parish when it was created in 1907. The Piedmont area went to St. Leo's in 1911. The Lake Merritt section was taken by Our Lady of Lourdes in 1921.

On February 21, 1886, the first mass was celebrated at Hanifin's Hall (still standing) at 19th and San Pablo. One week later, Archbishop Riordan came from San Francisco to appeal for funds to construct parish buildings, and \$7000 was subscribed on that day. In May, a church fair added \$6000 to the building fund.

With the collected money, Fr. Thomas McSweeney bought adjacent lots in a block known as the Jones Tract between 21st (then Hobart) and 22nd (then Jones) Streets which had formerly been used for circuses. The Jones Tract had originally extended to San Pablo but, in 1886, an 80-foot lot owned by James G. Fair was bought by the city to grade through Grove Street, creating an important intersection at the site of the projected church. Consolidating the lots bought by McSweeney gave the church 200 feet on the new Grove Street and 133 feet on 22nd and 21st Streets. Thirty-three feet of 21st Street was used for the first rectory (on the site of the present church). Between 1886 and 1888, assessors maps show that the area around the new church was much subdivided, indicating rapid development around the church site. The initial lands for the church cost \$14,500. In addition to the land, the school and church cost \$10,000 and the pastor's residence (rectory) \$5000.

Ground was broken in October 1886 for a combination school and temporary church facing Grove (at 22nd Street) and for the rectory facing 21st Street. The architect for both was T.J. Welch of San Francisco. The school had an upstairs auditorium which doubled as a church seating 600. On February 27, 1887, the temporary church was dedicated by Archbishop Patrick Riordan. At the dedication ceremony, the church hall was packed and hundreds stood outside.¹²

12 "Another Church Dedicated . . .", *The Monitor*, March 2, 1887,

A boys' and girls' elementary school operated by the Christian Brothers opened in July 1887 and a girls' high school was run by the Sisters of the Holy Names. The Christian Brothers taught boys in the elementary school from 1889 until 1899 when they consolidated their operations at Sacred Heart parish in Temescal. The girls' high school functioned at St. Francis de Sales from 1891 to 1931.

3. St. Francis de Sales Church

At the dedication of the temporary church, Father McSweeney had announced his plans for a permanent church "to cost at least \$15,000." The permanent church was first planned to face 21st Street. With the inauguration of cable car service on San Pablo, however, it was re-oriented to a more traditional east-west alignment, with a west-facing front. In 1889, an extra 100-foot lot was purchased on 21st Street to move the rectory back so that the permanent church could then face the important gore intersection of Grove and San Pablo, parallel to the school building. McSweeney began promoting what he hoped would be a magnificent new edifice for his important parish.

In April 1891, Mrs. Mary Jane Canning, a wealthy parishioner, privately informed Father McSweeney that she would donate \$75,000 for a new church if her anonymity would be assured. When the priest publicly announced that the parish would have the finest church in Oakland, intense speculation began as to the identity of the donor.

Architect Charles Devlin of San Francisco drew up plans, which he described as "Norman Gothic." Similar Gothic churches had previously been built by the Catholic church and major Protestant denominations in Oakland, but they had all been wood-frame structures located within the original town plat. St. Francis de Sales and the Unitarian Church (completed in 1890) were the first in Oakland to be built of masonry.

The population of Oakland in 1890 was 48,682 and growing fast. Farms and estates were being subdivided for building lots, and fortunes were being made by land speculators. Efficient public transit was critical for increasing the value of East Bay land and the 1890s witnessed the rapid extension of rail lines from downtown Oakland to Berkeley. On May 12, 1891, electric railway service was inaugurated between the two towns via Grove Street. The new church was to stand at the intersection of the Grove electric and San Pablo cable lines and only a block from the Telegraph Avenue steam line which, in 1893, was converted by Southern Pacific to electricity. By 1894, the East Bay had nearly sixty miles of electric and cable railways, one of the most extensive interurban networks in the U.S. Though somewhat peripheral to Oakland's downtown, St. Francis de Sales was easy of access. Its parish included the well-to-do residential neighborhoods of West Oakland through the Lake Merritt and Piedmont hills districts, as well as the more congested areas around the downtown. Its immediate neighborhood was ethnically-diverse; one block to the south stood the Norwegian Methodist Episcopal Church, suggesting a substantial Scandinavian population.

On September 13, 1891, Archbishop Riordan officiated at the cornerstone-laying of St. Francis de Sales Church, attended by a large crowd. The following items were placed in the cornerstone: a plan of the church, "the record of construction", several newspapers, a silver medal of the Virgin Mary, several United States coins, and "views of Oakland, presented by Frank J. Moffitt."¹³ When her initial \$75,000 proved insufficient, Mrs. Canning gave \$25,000 or \$50,000 more (accounts vary). The total initial cost of contracts reported in the *California Architect and Building News* was \$83,641. Mrs. Canning's donations included some, but not all, furnishings and finishes, which were reported separately.

Archbishop Riordan returned to dedicate the new church on July 9, 1893 with Archbishop Francis Satolli, Apostolic

13 "In His Name . . .", *ibid.*

Delegate to the U.S., singing the Pontifical Mass and representatives of Catholic University in Washington, DC attending. At the ceremony, the Archbishop ended two years of speculation and gossip by revealing the donor. Mrs. Canning told the Weekly Times that the church was not a memorial: "It was given solely for the glory and honor of God. I did not wish to receive any reward whatever from this world. I did it for the reward that I expect to receive hereafter."¹⁴ (A plaque in the narthex commemorates the donation, from Mary Canning and her husband James.)

At the time of the dedication, St. Francis de Sales parish had about 1600 members, the majority being Irish followed by French parishioners. The new church was designed to seat 1128. In addition to Mrs. Canning, several other donors contributed. A \$10,000 organ in the choir gallery was given by Mrs. Jane Driscoll. Parishioners also donated the fine German stained glass windows made and signed by Franz Mayer of Munich. McSweeney was especially proud of the Gothic altar of Carrara and Rutland marble with columns of Mexican onyx "resembling the Milan Cathedral" which was designed by Patrick Charles Keely, an important designer of Catholic churches in the eastern United States.

In addition to its school, the church was the center of an extremely active social life. Church-affiliated groups included the Sodality of the Children of Mary, the League of Cross Cadets (temperance), the Catholic Knights of America, the YMCA Society, the Reading Circle, a charity needlework guild, and the Catholic Truth Society.

By 1902, the parish had grown to 2300 members. In the same year, the Sisters of Providence opened the first Catholic hospital in Oakland on Broadway. Ministration of the hospital was largely the work of the clergy of St. Francis de Sales. When the present concrete structure on 30th Street was built, Sacred Heart parish, which was closer,

14 "A Romantic History", *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 10, 1893, p. 3.

took over ministration.

According to Monsignor Joseph Gleason's parish history, Father Peter Yorke took flashlight pictures of the church for a book on liturgy the night before the 1906 quake. Reported damage to the church was minimal except for a crack in the wall of the west top of the gospel side transept. (The recently-completed First Baptist Church on Telegraph Avenue and 22nd - another masonry structure - was severely damaged). Finials were broken off the main altar. Like many other churches, St. Francis de Sales served as a temporary shelter for refugees after the earthquake. The damage caused by the quake and fire in San Francisco wrought far greater changes in the demographics of the parish and in the appearance of the neighborhoods which it served.

Following the 1906 disaster, the East Bay experienced a sudden population explosion as refugees fled San Francisco. Many chose to stay, and these, combined with immigrants attracted by construction opportunities, triggered rapid expansion and infill. According to Gleason, refugees from the city gave the Oakland parish "a large sprinkling of Italian and Slavic families," while development of the Piedmont and Lake Merritt sections "paved the way for the later organization of St. Leo's (1911) and Our Lady of Lourdes (1921) parishes, composed of fine homes". A comparison of Sanborn maps from 1902 and 1912 shows a marked increase in density around the church. Wealthy parishioners were already leaving; single-family homes were being converted to flats and tenements while others were being built on recently-vacant lots. Industrial operations such as a pickle factory, soda works, power plant, and laundries also moved into the area.

Other developments served to encourage middle-class flight. In 1910, the Western Pacific Railroad entered Oakland and, with the earlier Key System, helped to weaken the Southern Pacific's stranglehold on the East Bay. In the same year, the Secretary of War adopted a plan for dredging the inner harbor to accommodate large ships. In 1911, after 58 years of controversy, Oakland acquired possession of two-thirds

of its waterfront from Southern Pacific. Anticipating the completion of the Panama Canal, the city undertook waterfront improvements which stimulated further industrial growth in West Oakland.

The Silver Jubilee (25th anniversary) of the parish was marked by a major renovation in 1911. This was paid for in part by \$15,000 left for the purpose by Mrs. Canning before she died in 1904. The pastor commissioned Michael O'Sullivan to paint trompe-l'oeil tracery for its plaster ceiling and 25 clerestory murals illustrating the life of Christ. When the work was complete, the church was rededicated in a large celebration.

In 1914, due to rapidly failing health, McSweeney returned to his home town in Ireland where he died on July 31, 1915. A mass said for him at St. Francis de Sales, at the same time as his funeral in Ireland, was attended by more than 150 priests, representatives of several religious orders, and a capacity crowd.

On August 20, 1915, Patrick J. Keane, who had served as parish administrator, was appointed to fill McSweeney's position. Keane bought an additional 40 feet east of the existing parish residence and immediately began a fund drive for a new 3-story brick-faced rectory building which was completed in 1916. The rectory was designed by Shea & Lofquist, well-regarded San Francisco architects of Catholic churches.

In 1923, the old wooden school north of the church was razed and replaced by a new brick building designed by James Plachek, which in turn was demolished in 1976. About 1925, the bus terminal was built across the street. The economic status of the parish continued to decline.

During the 1920s, Oakland's retail and entertainment district spread north, though it remained east of Telegraph Avenue, anchored by Capwell's Department Store. The conversion of houses to apartments and tenements, and the incursion of factories, hotels, warehouses, stores, and parking lots accelerated, and by 1940, Gleason considered

it "in all respects a downtown parish," especially "as the more modest old homes in the older section of the parish have been used for the planting of families on relief." He reported that many who attended Mass were strangers from outside the parish and often were non-Catholics attracted by the beauty of the church.

In 1941, the parish celebrated its Golden Jubilee. Gleason, by this time the pastor, told reporters that "St. Francis is a monument of ecclesiastical art that attracts visitors of various faiths from all over the country."¹⁵ Michael O'Sullivan returned to restore his paintings. The narthex was panelled in hardwood and new lighting was installed. The following year, Msgr. Gleason's own Golden Jubilee was celebrated in a major public event attended by numerous bishops and other church officials.

4. Cathedral of the Diocese of Oakland

Because of the enormous growth of the East Bay, administration of the Archdiocese of San Francisco became unwieldy after the Second World War. On January 13, 1962, the Diocese of Oakland was created by the Roman Curia and broke off from the Archdiocese of San Francisco, of which it had been a part for 111 years. Often described as the most beautiful church in the San Francisco Archdiocese, St. Francis de Sales was designated by canonical document as the Cathedral of the new See. Oakland's first Bishop, Floyd L. Begin, was installed on April 28, 1962.

Although not designated as a cathedral until much later, St. Francis de Sales in some ways had played the role of a cathedral from the beginning. It was comparable in size to cathedrals in many cities, and it was built with a bishop's throne. Archbishop Riordan was a frequent visitor to the church during its early decades. All of its pastors were prominent within the Diocese of Oakland; one, Patrick J. Keane, became the Bishop of Sacramento, and three were

15 "St. Francis de Sales Church to Observe Golden Jubilee", *Oakland Tribune*, September 7, 1941, p. 6.

Domestic Prelates, honorary designations by the Pope. And it was the scene of several major celebrations of a size and character usually associated with Cathedrals rather than parish churches. These included its dedication in 1893, the Silver Jubilee of the Parish in 1911, the funeral of Father McSweeney in 1915, the Golden Jubilee of the church in 1941, and the Golden Jubilee of Monsignor Gleason's priesthood in 1942. Each of these celebrations drew an overflow crowd and was attended by bishops, monsignors, representatives of the national and international church hierarchies, and delegations from various religious orders.

Bishop Begin announced in 1966 that the church would be modernized. Instead, "Many urged the erection of a new cathedral, others suggested designating another parish as the cathedral parish." At that time, the blighted neighborhood was slated to be further savaged by the Grove Shafter Freeway. Begin's decision was a matter of economy: a new cathedral, he said, would be too costly: "I will leave that to some future successor when the diocese can better afford it." Planning for the modernization had begun in 1962. Work began in June 1966 and was completed early in 1967. Seventy-five percent of the cost was for "reconditioning;" none of it was structural. "The remainder of the cost will bring the cathedral to the forefront of liturgical renewal urged by the Vatican Council."¹⁶

The decision to remodel a church at least partly chosen for cathedral status because of its sumptuous interior was controversial. According to the Tribune, "Many parishioners reluctantly accepted reconstruction." A church bazaar was held in August 1966 to sell much of the old liturgical art accumulated since the time of McSweeney. The altars were dismantled and "500 pieces of Italian marble weighing 70 tons were stacked for sale in the schoolyard." Included was a three-ton Italian marble Pieta

¹⁶ "Extensive Reconditioning for St. Francis de Sales Cathedral", *Alameda Times Star*, June 17, 1966.

and ornate brass candelabra.¹⁷

The Oakland Cathedral was the first in the U.S. to be completely adapted to the renewal, and it was an extreme example. The red brick exterior of the church was painted white and O'Sullivan's paintings on the interior were painted over or removed (the disposition of these paintings is not known). The Gothic high altar was replaced by a simple granite table which allowed celebrants to face the congregation. A new bishop's throne was installed at the rear of the apse backed by a wood-ribbed wall surmounted with a sculpture of Christ. The ribbed wall covered the large stained glass windows in the apse, carrying out the new idea that windows in the sanctuary diverted attention from the altar.

Harold Rambusch, a leading church decorator of the firm Rambusch: Designers, Craftsmen, Lighting Engineers, provided the design for the remodeling; McClure and Messinger were the structural engineers; Volmer & Williams were the electrical and mechanical engineers; the architects were Reynolds and Chamberlain with Robert Ruano in charge. Clement J. Finney, the building coordinator for the Diocese, supervised and coordinated the various phases. A brochure of the Rambusch firm stated, "While the interior had previously been extremely busy and 'over' decorated, the solution is as shown... simple and positive."

The two decades at St. Francis de Sales before the 1989 earthquake have been preserved on a videotape produced in 1987: Portrait of a Parish At Prayer. Father Donald Osuna speaks of the 1966 remodeling as a terrible shock and a "disaster" for the declining inner-city parish. He and two other priests decided to make the Oakland Cathedral a model for the modernized liturgy, and invited artists to design banners, hangings, and vestments for the church ceremonies. The choir was brought down from the loft and a new organ added; the church became famous for its music which

17 "Old Church Relics Sold at Bazaar", *Oakland Tribune*,
September 18, 1966, p. 5-C.

included contemporary compositions and arrangements. Performances by groups such as the Pickle Family Circus were held in the Floyd Begin Plaza in front of the church. The liturgy was greatly democratized and the parish became a model of racial integration.

Liturgical changes associated with the Second Vatican Council (commonly referred to as Vatican II) affected both ritual practices and the physical fabric of the church. St. Francis de Sales had been founded and built in the Catholic Church as it was shaped by Vatican I, which was a major council of the Catholic church in 1869-1870 that revised many practices, beliefs, and organizational issues of the church. Vatican II, which met from 1962 to 1965, was intended as a parallel effort, to renew religious life in a changed world. A major aspect of Vatican II was its liturgical reform, including the replacement of the Latin language in the mass for vernacular languages; breaking down of the strong hierarchical character of the relationship of the priest to the people; revision of the mass; and expression of these changes in the art, architecture, vestments, and liturgical objects in the church. These changes were supported by an active effort to incorporate modern art and music in the churches. According to former parishioner Dr. David Ramsey of the Archives for Modern Christian Art, the modernized services and music attracted worshipers to St. Francis de Sales from throughout the country; as much as half of the congregation on any Sunday would be visitors attracted by its reputation.

In 1976, the two-story brick school building, erected in 1923, was demolished. In 1977, a new Parish Hall, designed by William Gillis & Associates, Architects, of Oakland, was built at the rear of the site of the old school, facing 22nd Street behind a parking lot.

The church was closed immediately after the Loma Prieta earthquake on October 17, 1989 because of structural damage. Even before the quake, the diocese decided to redirect funding from liturgy to social services, and parishioners again had begun to drift away. After the

quake, the congregation met for a time for worship services in the adjacent parish hall, and Dr. Ramsey questioned whether the unique spirit of the renewed cathedral could ever be recaptured. Recently, the congregation was joined with the parish of St. Mary's. The complete history of the structure since the earthquake is discussed in Part IV of this report.

5. Important Persons Associated with St. Francis de Sales

- a. Pastors/Rectors:** As the largest parish in Oakland, a series of distinguished priests were appointed as pastor (or rector, following designation as the Cathedral). These are listed below. Father McSweeney, who was the first pastor and played a major role in the original development and later embellishment of the church and Father Osuna who was instrumental in implementing the new liturgy and music, are also discussed separately.

Thomas McSweeney 1886-1915

Patrick J. Keane 1915-1920
appointed Bishop of Sacramento in 1921

Francis Xavier Morrison 1921-1924

Monsignor Edward Dempsey 1924-1928
appointed Domestic Prelate by Pope Pius XI in 1924

Monsignor Joseph M. Gleason 1928-1942
appointed Domestic Prelate by Pope Benedict XV in 1919

Monsignor Richard A. O'Donnell 1942-1968
appointed Domestic Prelate by Pope Pius XII in 1947

Monsignor Michael H. Lucid 1968-1971

Monsignor Joseph Skillin 1971-1973

Robert Fontaine 1973-1975

E. Donald Osuna 1975-1986

James T. Keeley 1986-1993

b. Bishops

Bishop Floyd L. Begin 1962-1977

Bishop John Cummins 1977-present

- c. Father Thomas McSweeney (also spelled "McSweeny"):** Born 1852 in Tramore, County Waterford, Ireland. Educated in Dublin. Sailed for U.S. in 1875. Served in San Francisco, Sacramento, and Oakland. St. Francis de Sales parish was created January 29, 1886 and he was appointed pastor on February 5.

McSweeney served the parish for nearly thirty years. Though not as famous as Michael King of the Church of the Immaculate Conception or Peter Yorke and William Gleason of St. Anthony's, he was, according to many accounts, one of most deeply read, popular, and best beloved priests in the Archdiocese, a good friend of the Archbishop, and his death in 1915 was deeply mourned by the parish.

- d. Father E. Donald Osuna:** Born May 2, 1936, ordained as a priest in 1963, Donald Osuna received an M.A. in Fine Arts from Mills College where he studied electronic music and recording media. He began at St. Francis de Sales in 1967 as Director of Music and was Rector from 1975 to 1985, cathedral liturgist in 1986, and left in 1987. Today he is pastor of St. Jerome's Church in El Cerrito, California.

- e. James and Mary Canning:** James Canning (born in Ireland 1810, died March 20, 1892) left an estate of \$500,000. He attained wealth by investing in San Francisco and Oakland real estate and was listed in city directories as a capitalist. Michael Davitt, founder of the Irish Land League and a charismatic hero of the Home Rule movement, was a good friend of the Cannings and was

married on December 30, 1886 to Mrs. Canning's niece in Hanifin's Hall.

Mrs. Canning (born Mary Jane McCann in Ireland in 1830, died January 25, 1904) came to Oakland in 1858 and worked as a cook for Horace Carpentier who had been the first mayor of Oakland: "under his guidance the future benefactress . . . amassed a fortune from investments in Oakland property".¹⁸ At her death, the Tribune announced she had given a total of \$142,000 to the parish, at that time, the most munificent gift ever made to any denomination in Oakland. She was also a large donor to Providence Hospital in Oakland at the time it was established. The Cannings lived at 954 16th Street in an Italianate house which is an Oakland City Landmark. They are buried at St. Mary's Cemetery in Oakland in a vault commissioned by Mrs. Canning after the death of her husband, designed by Charles J.I. Devlin.

Although James Canning was still alive when Mary Canning made her first large donation to St. Francis de Sales, and although his name was inscribed on the dedication plaque in the narthex, numerous newspaper articles and other documents attribute the gifts solely to Mary Canning.

¹⁸ Peter T. Conmy, *ibid.*

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. **Architectural character:** St. Francis de Sales Church is characteristic of many late 19th-century Roman Catholic cathedrals and churches built in American cities. It is a large brick building which is in the Gothic Revival style largely by virtue of an application of Gothic details that appear to be drawn from Pugin. Like many such churches by first and second generation Irish architects, the overall composition is unsophisticated. The massing of the nave, transepts, and sanctuary reflect the cruciform plan, to which is added a high and massive corner tower at the west end, and a low sacristy behind the sanctuary. Inside, there is a principal space consisting of the nave, transepts, and sanctuary with a vaulted plaster ceiling of equal height, and aisles along the nave of lower height. Remodeled in 1966, the exterior has been re-painted a light color and the interior has been stripped of most of its early embellishments, so that the vacant church today is closer to its original minimally decorated appearance than it was for most of its existence.
2. **Condition of Fabric:** Structural studies of St. Francis de Sales had been made in January 1989 by David L. Messinger, Associates, Structural Engineers and had been reviewed by the office of Shapiro, Okino, Hom, Engineers. In March 1989 H.J. Degenkolb Associates, Engineers, were asked to give a second opinion and their study had just been completed when the Loma Prieta earthquake of October 17, 1989 occurred which seriously damaged the building. In particular, large cracks appeared in the brick walls of the bell tower, the transepts and in other upper wall areas. Inside, the ceiling was cracked and much plaster fell in the south transept. The major damage to the building conformed almost exactly to the predictions of the structural studies. The building was immediately provided with cables and braces for temporary stabilization. The church has been vacant since that time.
3. **Architectural Context:** Many of the earliest churches built

in the Gold Rush period in California were prefabricated buildings with stud frames, and canvas walls, wood, or corrugated metal siding. Most of these were generic buildings that might have been used for warehouses, commercial buildings or other purposes. Most were simple, undecorated structures. A few were nominally Gothic Revival in style. Purpose-built churches were built in the major cities like San Francisco and Sacramento, and in the Gold country, mostly of wood and in a few cases of brick. Many of these were Gothic Revival in style. Old St. Mary's in San Francisco is a brick Gothic Revival church built in 1853. Many other churches, particularly for Protestant denominations in the 1850s were built in the Greek Revival Style. Most of these were designed by builders who relied on books like *Upjohn's Rural Churches* for planning ideas and decorative details. Later, specific denominations produced their own handbooks, like Charles Sholl's *Ten Working Designs for Catholic Churches* of 1869.

Until the 1880s most California churches were small. In that decade, population growth in the cities, growing wealth, and a prosperous economy led to a new generation of much larger churches. During the period of construction of St. Francis de Sales (1891-1893), the local architectural journal, *California Architect and Building News*, contained many items about churches, both about specific churches and about churches in general. On March 20, 1892, the following statement appeared: "More church edifices have been planned to be built this year than for any previous year, not alone in San Francisco, but in nearly all the cities and towns of the interior."¹⁹ Most of these new churches were wood buildings in the Gothic Revival Style. A few of these churches, like St. Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco and St. Francis de Sales in Oakland, were built of brick. (By about 1890 there were four brick Catholic churches and several other brick churches in San Francisco, and one other brick church in Oakland - First Unitarian. The growing use of brick was also a function of changing building codes).

19 *California Architect and Building News*, March 20, 1892, p. 25.

In the context of the whole state, such churches were the largest, most expensive, and most prominent of their time (in many cases, they were the tallest and most conspicuous buildings in town). A few congregations, usually of liberal denominations (e.g. Episcopalian and Unitarian), such as Trinity Episcopal in San Francisco, built brick or stone-faced brick structures in the Romanesque Revival Style in this period. Nationally, among Catholic churches, parish churches were usually built of red brick and Cathedrals of brick or stone.

Up until this time most churches were cruciform or rectangular in plan. Many interiors were built with exposed roof trusses and variable ceiling heights between nave and sanctuary. A few, like St. Francis de Sales, were built with plaster ceilings of a continuous height from nave to sanctuary. The former system was usually preferred by architectural critics such as Cram and Maginnis²⁰ who preferred the more picturesque spaces created by exposed trusses. The latter had better acoustical qualities both for music and for preaching. An article in the *California Architect and Building News* just before plans were announced for St. Francis de Sales discussed this among other means to improve acoustics in churches.²¹

By the late 1890s, many Protestant churches followed a new model. In plan they were more open and square, with attached Sunday School buildings - this was called the Akron plan. And in style they relied on a more eclectic mix of sources.

20 R.A. Cram, "On the Contemporary Architecture of the Catholic Church", *The Catholic World* vol. 58 (October 1893 to March 1894), p. 644-654; and C.D. Maginnis, "Catholic Church Architecture: Paper II", *The Brickbuilder* vol. 15 (1906), p. 46-52.

21 John Belcher, "Musical Requirements in Churches", *California Architect and Building News*, July 1891, p. 78-79 (Reprinted from Royal Institute of British Architects Journal).

By the turn of the century there was more diversity apparent in Catholic churches as well. The Irish and French dominated, Gothic-Revival-Style churches of the 19th century were joined by Rundbogenstil churches for German congregations and neoclassical or Renaissance Revival churches for Italian congregations, as successive groups attained wealth and numbers and began to assert separate identities. In plan many of the Italian churches were basilicas.

In the late 19th century, the Catholic population was booming with immigration from Ireland, Germany, Italy and other countries, and there was a shortage of architects to build the great number of new churches needed. Many Catholic architects were drawn from the immigrant population groups they served and had not had the sophisticated training available to architects of the better established, upper-class churches. Patrick Keely, the Irish-born father of American Catholic church architecture and designer of the altar at St. Francis de Sales was such an architect, as was Charles Devlin, architect of St. Francis de Sales. In the 20th century, the Catholic church more often looked to outside architects, and Catholic architects themselves were often privy to the same quality of training as other architects in America.

B. Description of Exterior:

- 1. Overall dimensions:** The footprint of St. Francis de Sales, including the tower, narthex, and baptistery across the front; the principal cruciform interior, including side aisles; and the wraparound sacristy at the rear, is irregular but generally rectangular in shape, measuring about 167' 7" long by 97' 4" wide at the transepts and 85' 5" wide through the center line of the narthex at the west (front) end. The walls of the nave are 40' 5" high. The tower at the southwest corner of the building is about 27' square at its base. Its brick walls are 96' high, with a wooden spire 58' high above it, surmounted by a cross, so that the entire tower is about 154' high.

The principal interior space is 60' high with side aisles of 34'. At the west end, an organ and choir loft opens onto this space above the narthex. A stairway in the tower provides access to the organ and choir loft and up two more levels to the bell. Although there was originally no basement, part of the area under the floor at the east end has been excavated and finished for storage space. The sacristy at the east end, divided into a north and south sacristy, is one story in height.

2. **Foundations:** The church is built on brick foundations with concrete bases. These are widest under the bell tower. In addition, there are six brick walls, 13" wide, which run east-west under the principal interior, on which rest the floor joists and columns of the interior aisles and crossing.
3. **Walls:** The brick walls of St. Francis de Sales range in thickness from 13" in the sacristy to 31" in the transepts and bell tower at the base. The brick is laid in common bond with four stretcher courses for each header course, a costlier and more conservative ratio than in most construction of the period. In addition, custom molded brick is used in the corbelled cornice and elsewhere. Visually, the walls are braced along the nave by brick buttresses. The brick was provided by the Remillard Brick Company, one of the major producers of brick in the Bay Area.

The walls are trimmed with terra cotta string courses, hood molds around the windows, and other details. The exterior was originally painted red; in 1966 it was painted white; in 1980 it was painted cream.

4. **Structural systems, framing:** St. Francis de Sales is built of load-bearing brick masonry walls which carry two separate systems of timber framing of redwood for the ceiling and the roof.

The roof structure itself is in several parts. Over the nave, where the span is the greatest, 2" x 10" trussed rafters span from the tops of the brick walls to the ridge

with intermediate support from a 2" x 8" stud wall about 13' in from the exterior walls, which is in turn supported by a girder and the columns which separate the nave from the aisles. The trussed rafters are trussed in two places: directly above the nave under the ridge, and above each aisle between the exterior wall and the intermediate support columns. Over the transepts and the sanctuary where the exterior walls are higher and the span of the rafters is not as great, there is no intermediate support, and only a central truss below the ridge. At the crossing, a pair of scissor trusses, spanning diagonally across the space at right angles to one another, support the roof. These span from the intersections of the side walls of the sanctuary and the east walls of the two transepts, to the two intersections of the opposite sides of the transepts and the sides of the nave. These latter points are supported by continuations of the west sides of the brick walls of the transepts above the aisles, which are supported by columns.

This is a sophisticated system which solved a difficult but commonly encountered problem in church architecture. The use of scissor trusses for churches was illustrated by Minard Lafever in 1833 and in old examples by Pugin, and became a common means of creating interior spaces that projected into the roof space, especially in Gothic Revival churches with steeply pitched roofs. Sholl illustrated scissor trusses and Patrick Charles Keely used scissor trusses in St. Joseph's Cathedral in Hartford (designed 1873).

An entirely separate system is utilized to support the ceiling. This is done with curved segmental wooden laminated arches which span the nave, transepts and sanctuary. These arches consist of paired 2" x 12"s which are supported in recesses of the brick exterior walls of the building and, in the nave, by vertical members in the plane of the 2" x 8" stud wall above the ceiling flanking the nave (supported by the columns between the nave and aisles). The ceiling of wood lath and plaster, shaped in the form of vaults, is attached to straight wood framing secured to the undersides of the arches.

The structure of the floor consists of 2" x 12" joists supported on the exterior walls and intermediate foundation walls, with straight wood sheathing.

5. **Entryways:** The church is entered by the public through three portals at the west end and by single portals at the northwest and southwest corners of the nave and transepts, and by the priests from the rear of the sacristies. The three portals of the west end are identical in size and design. They are reached up a short flight of steps. Each is recessed in a lancet arch with a hood molding of molded brick. Each consists of a pair of paneled doors with iron hardware beneath a tympanum of stained glass. There are two metal lanterns on the columns between the portals. The single entries at the corners of the transepts are smaller, simpler versions of the front portals without the stained glass. They are set in one-story projections, and the portals themselves are each in an angled corner wall surmounted by a steep gable and topped by a finial similar to those at the gable ends of the transepts.
6. **Chimneys:** As there was originally no heating system in the church, there are no chimneys.
7. **Windows:** St. Francis de Sales is lit by numerous windows, most of them lancet arches, and most filled with stained glass. Frames and tracery are of painted wood. The windows light useable interior spaces - the narthex, the baptistery, the choir loft level, the tower, the principal interior, and the sacristies. These are all discussed below (Description of Interior, Section 5 - Openings). Small, unusually shaped openings at the top of the gables have louvers behind wood tracery to ventilate the space between the ceiling and the roof. The openings at the top of the tower are louvered to accommodate the bell inside.
8. **Roof:**
 - a. **Shape, covering:** The roof of St. Francis de Sales is a steeply pitched gable in shape except where it is faceted at the semi-octagonal apse ends of the sanctuary and the baptistery wing, and on the spire of the tower,

discussed below. Everywhere it is covered with slate in alternating bands of rectangular and scalloped shapes. There is a molded metal ridgecap along the ridgelines with crosses above the sanctuary and at the top of the spire, and a knob embellished with intertwined grapes, leaves, and vines at the top hip of the baptistery wing roof.

- b. **Cornice, eaves:** The roof meets the tops of the walls without any significant overhang of the eaves. The tops of the walls are articulated by a corbelled cornice of molded brick which houses gutters. There are few visible downspouts and all appear to be replacements.
- c. **Dormers, cupolas, towers, and finials:** One of the most notable features of the design of St. Francis de Sales is its lively roofline created by pinnacles, finials, and other embellishments and the spire of its high tower. The tops of the gables of the west end and transepts are surmounted by crosses of the same design. Similarly, the tops of the sanctuary and spire are surmounted by crosses of another design (possibly not original). The bases of the gables, the four corners of the tower at the level of the bell, and the outside corners of the chapel roofs east of the transepts, are all surmounted by pinnacles. At the front of the building and on the tower, these have octagonal bases with plain pyramidal roofs. The other pinnacles are square with pyramidal roofs surmounted by large and small fleur de lis. The crosses and pinnacles appear to be among those features provided by the Forderer Cornice Works, and to be of formed sheet metal. There are small, triangular dormers with louvers for ventilation at the rear of the apse and on the spire. The spire is the extremely steep, timber frame roof of the brick bell tower. It has four principal sides with chamfered corners at the upper level where the louvered openings occur.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. **Floor plans:** The basic plan of the church is that of a

cross oriented so that the principal entry is at the west end and the sanctuary is at the east end. The principal cruciform interior space is entered by the public through a narthex at the west end. At the north end of the narthex is the baptistery and at the south end is the tower which houses the staircase to the choir and organ loft above the narthex. The principal space includes the nave and side aisles, the north and south transepts, the crossing, the sanctuary, chapels at the northeast and southeast corners of the crossing (originally, the chapels of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, respectively), and the second-level choir and organ loft at the rear. The north and south sacristies are irregular shaped spaces on either side of the sanctuary, linked by a corridor across the rear. At the north end of the choir and organ loft, on the second level above the baptistery, there is a high-ceilinged room lit by stained glass windows which has been filled with organ machinery and divided by a low loft.

2. **Stairways:** There is one principal stairway at St. Francis de Sales, located in the massive tower at the southwest corner of the building. This stairway is entered from the south end of the narthex and rises up three levels, providing access to the organ and choir loft, to an intermediate landing, and to the bell floor. Access is also provided to the attic above the ceiling of the main part of the church (through a door at a landing below the bell floor), and to the inside of the spire. The stair itself is a left-handed, originally open-well stairway with a newel post at each floor level. The railing is supported by a balustrade consisting of turned columns and a jigsaw capital band of pointed arches and trefoils. The stairway walls have a low redwood wainscoting of very simple design, and the whole stairway is lit by stained glass windows. In recent years, the ground floor level has been partitioned to meet fire codes and provide rest rooms. There is no interior stairway to the finished area of the basement which is reached directly from the outside.
3. **Flooring:** The original flooring in most of the church consists of 1" straight wood sheathing laid over the joists. In the narthex and baptistery the original wood

floors were covered with patterned light brown terrazzo flooring outlined with bands of red and dark green, from the 1941 renovation of the church. A hole in the terrazzo in the baptistery reveals a diamond-patterned cork flooring underneath. The main floor of the church was covered with terrazzo, which matched the narthex floor, and carpeting in 1966.

4. **Wall and ceiling finish:** Most wall surfaces in St. Francis de Sales are plaster on wood lath above wood wainscoting. The height, material and design of the wainscoting are different in different areas. In the richly decorated narthex the oak wainscoting of lancet panels above square panels reaches to the tops of the doors. (This paneling, from 1941, is laid over the original low redwood wainscoting and plaster walls above; the plaster walls were stenciled with a quatrefoil pattern, probably in 1911). In the baptistery, redwood wainscoting of trefoil panels rises to the bottoms of the stained glass windows. In the nave and transepts the wainscoting of trefoil panels over square panels, reaches to the tops of the doors. No original wainscoting survives in the sanctuary or chapels, but the sanctuary walls are sheathed in wood ribbing for their full height, from the 1966 remodeling. Redwood wainscoting in the stairway and in the organ and choir loft is low and simple in design. There are three inscriptions from the Bible carved above the doors of the narthex. In addition, there is an inscription ("Let Her Works Praise Her") carved in wood below a marble plaque in Latin to James and Mary Canning between two of the doors of the narthex. Although newspaper accounts stated that the wood of the interior was ash, the wainscoting in the nave, aisles, and transepts is redwood, stained to blend with the oak doors in color. The wood paneling on the columns has been painted a uniform brown color.

Plastered upper wall surfaces are white, painted plaster, with a sheathing of acoustical tile in some areas. The ceilings in the narthex, baptistery, and principal interior of the church are plaster over curved wood lath in the shape of groin vaults, except in the baptistery where a fan vaulting pattern was used. The plaster ceiling surfaces of

the baptistery are painted in a trompe l'oeil imitation of glass mosaic, using gold leaf and paints. The vaults are supported by free-standing columns in the nave and crossing and by corbels along the walls of the aisles, nave, and transepts. The columns are in the typical Gothic form of clustered colonettes, executed in wood. The corbels, probably executed in cast plaster, are smaller versions of a similar clustered colonette motif. The intersections of the ribs in the vaulting are decorated with cast plaster bosses of slightly different shapes and sizes depending on the hierarchy of their location and visual function.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The most important interior doorways are the five entries from the narthex into the adjoining interior parts of the church. At the north end is the entrance to the baptistery; at the south end is the entrance to the tower with its stairway to the organ and choir loft and the bell; and along the east side are the three entrances into the nave. Each of these entrances consists of a double door, and each door has four panels - two solid wood panels below and two panels of etched or beveled glass above. The glass panels in all the doors from the narthex are in the shape of a Gothic arch, and each doorway has a pointed transom of beveled glass. There is a similar doorway from each transept entrance vestibule, consisting of a four-paneled double door with clear beveled glass upper panels and a stained glass transom above.

There are also several single doors in the church. There is a 6-paneled door in the shape of a Gothic arch between the stairway in the tower and the organ and choir loft. Three doors lead out of each sacristy, into the sanctuary, the transept, and the rear corridor. These are simple four-paneled doors with jigsaw Gothic motifs inserted on the sides facing the sanctuary and transepts.

b. Windows: The stained glass windows visible on the interior are one of the principal decorative features of

the church. In the nave there are four pairs of lancet windows on each side, each with two apostles; the northeast window depicts the Irish saints, Bridget and Patrick and the southeast window depicts St. Francis de Sales and St. Thomas Aquinas. In the south transept is a large Gothic arched "Last Supper", recently vandalized, above a row of four small lancet windows with purely decorative designs. In the north transept is a rendering of Carl Muller's "Holy Night"; the lancet windows below were covered over for the installation of the modern organ. In the organ and choir loft is a large Gothic arched window which includes St. Cecilia, the patron saint of music, surrounded by six angels playing instruments. The windows which light the stair tower are all purely decorative. At the top level the glass is broken where stabilizing bars have been placed. In the baptistery, the windows are decorative except one window illustrating the theme "Suffer the little children to come unto me".

In the south sacristy there are three grisaille stained glass windows each consisting of a pair of lancet windows beneath a multifoil window. These windows represent the suffering of Christ with images of a bleeding heart, a lamb, a swan, a paten and a chalice in a palette of deep reds and oranges. In the north sacristy, there is the same organization of three windows, but most of the lancet windows have been replaced with obscure glass. The multifoil windows above are intact; one is a faded image of a priest, probably Father McSweeney.

6. **Decorative features and trim:** The decorative features and trim today are a mix of historic and recent features. The recent features are described in the section on remodelings. The principal historic decorative features are four angels in the transepts, one each at the top of the central columns of each arm; the baptismal font of marble and onyx, now sitting in the narthex; three (of four) surviving Gothic confessionals, two in the nave and one in the south transept; and a Victorian gilt mirror in the south sacristy. In the baptistery the fan vaulted

ceiling is painted mosaic with delicate polychrome floral motifs and painted tracery with gilt highlights.

7. **Hardware:** The principal use of decorative hardware at St. Francis de Sales is in the strap-like iron hinges on the outside doors. There are some original knobs and hinges in obscure locations, such as upper level stair tower doors, which were of standard manufacture.

8. **Mechanical Equipment:**

- a. **Heating and ventilation:** The church was originally built without any heat. Ventilation was achieved through a passive system that drew air in through openable sash in the lancet windows and exhausted it through narrow slits on either side of the ribs along the vault ridge and into the attic space. The attic space was ventilated through louvered dormers and openings in the gable end walls. A secondary ventilation system, to facilitate the operation of the gas lighting system, drew air in through decorative iron registers in the outside walls through passages created by the furring out of wainscoting, and into the church through small wood registers along the tops of the wainscoting near each gas light. The basement is ventilated through similar decorative iron registers. A heating system of unknown character was installed in 1911. Today individual hot water convector units are scattered around the main church interior. Most of the units date from the 1966 remodeling, but the boiler for the system, and some of the units, were already in place at that time.
- b. **Lighting:** The original lighting was by gas lamps, ignited electrically from a switchboard in the sacristy. This system was replaced at least twice, most recently in 1966. The lighting now is all with modern electric fixtures, except in the baptistery where a 1911 lamp hangs from the ceiling.
- c. **Plumbing:** The original plumbing contract was primarily for the system of gas lighting. Water long supplied to

the north sacristy may also have been installed as part of the original contract. Today, water is also supplied to modern restrooms at the base of the tower.

d. Bell: The bell was originally rung by pulling a rope. Its operation was changed to electric power with a control panel at the base of the bell tower, probably in 1941 when electrical work was done in the narthex.

9. Original furnishings: Original furnishings, including the altars (removed), confessionals, font, pews (removed), pulpit (removed), and organ are discussed elsewhere in this report. Original furnishings in the sacristies were removed and new cabinets were installed in 1966.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: St. Francis de Sales Church is a generally rectangular structure oriented east-west at the northeast corner of a busy urban intersection. It faces Martin Luther King Jr. Way near its intersection with San Pablo Avenue between 21st and 22nd Streets. Martin Luther King Jr. Way turns slightly to the north at this point, on its way toward Berkeley from the waterfront, so that St. Francis de Sales appears to sit at the head of the street from the lower blocks toward the water. In 1977, the property in front of the church was extended with a plaza. Across the street is the main bus station in Oakland. Nearby to the northwest is a raised freeway. Otherwise the immediate surroundings consist mainly of 19th-century frame houses, early 20th-century apartment buildings and hotels, and vacant lots.

2. Historic landscape design: Original concrete sidewalks built by George Goodman in 1886 have been replaced. The Floyd L. Begin Plaza built in front of the church in 1977, consisting of planters, steps, walls, and seating in an asymmetrical plan, has been closed and fenced for safety reasons since the 1989 earthquake.

3. Outbuildings: The cathedral property today includes a three-story, wood-frame rectory, with a brick veneer just

east of the church. The rectory was built in 1916 in a modified Renaissance style. It contains public rooms and offices on the ground floor, and living quarters upstairs and in the back. This is a modest building with extensive use of wood paneling on the ground floor and elsewhere with simple finishes.

North of the church is the parish hall built in 1977. Adjacent to the rectory is a brick garage.

*FOR MAPS AND ARCHITECTURAL PLANS SEE FIELD NOTES

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural drawings: See Part I, Section 5 above.

B. Historic views: See Part I, Section 5 above.

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

When St. Francis de Sales was damaged in the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, it was closed and temporary strengthening measures were immediately taken to stabilize the structure. During the next five months a study was undertaken by H.J. Degenkolb Associates, Engineers; Gillis-Judson-Wade, Architects; and the Oliver Company, General Contractors for a proposal to restore the building for continued use as a Cathedral. The report was submitted March 22, 1990 to the Diocese of Oakland and for the next seven months methods of raising the necessary funds to accomplish the restoration were studied. Bishop John Cummins announced in October 1990, a year after the earthquake, that the raising and spending of large sums of money on the building was not possible and that demolition would be proposed. Demolition of the church was subject to review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). CEQA required the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) which, among other things, would assess the historic and architectural significance of St. Francis de Sales and the impact of demolishing a significant structure, and would identify measures that would "mitigate" the impact of demolishing a significant structure.

St. Francis de Sales appeared to meet criteria A, B and C of the National Register of Historic Places, as well as the criteria for designation as an Oakland City Landmark (in the early 1980s it was considered for landmark status but was not designated). As a condition of approval of the EIR, the Oakland Department of City Planning required, as a mitigation measure for the proposed demolition, that the Diocese of Oakland document the cathedral to HABS standards. In consultation with the National Park Service, this report has been prepared by Michael Corbett, architectural historian, in August 1993 (drawing on material previously prepared for the EIR by Gray Brechin and Michael Corbett and with the knowledgeable editorial assistance of Ted Milhous, Gillis-Judson-Wade, Architects, and Clement J. Finney of the Diocese of Oakland) for submission to the Library of Congress, the State Historic Preservation Office, and the Oakland History Room of the Oakland Public Library, as a donated recording project. Photographs were taken by David DeVries of Mesa Technical. Drawings were prepared by David Logan Messinger & Associates for a report to the diocese in 1989. The labeled floor plan was

prepared by Brady and Associates for the EIR.

The EIR was approved by the Oakland Planning Commission along with the recommended approval of the demolition permit. However, the issuance of the demolition permit was withheld until September 1, 1993 to permit the Diocese to offer the property for sale and to receive any proposals for purchase and restoration of the building. On August 11, 1993, the *Oakland Tribune* reported that Trinity Missionary Baptist Church, a long established Oakland church, had offered to buy St. Francis de Sales and restore it. Since that time, it appears that the deal has fallen through in the face of apparently higher cost estimates for restoring the building, and preparations for demolition are proceeding. These preparations include a salvage plan and record of the disposition of salvaged items to be kept on file at the offices of the Diocese. Stained glass windows, artworks, pews, and organs are among those items to be salvaged.

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